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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of the want ad sections of Sunday newspapers in 14 cities in the United States and of Saturday newspapers in 3 Canadian cities in February 1990 to determine what qualifications employers required of secretaries. Data from 4,500 individual ads were tabulated. The survey tracked 34 types of information in secretarial ads relating to skills and qualities required, job duties, salaries, and industry of the employer. Key findings included the following: (1) word processing is still the most-requested skill for secretaries, appearing in 54 percent of the ads; (2) many ads prefer backgrounds in specific software programs, especially WordPerfect and Lotus 1-2-3; (3) only 11 percent of the ads ask for shorthand or note-taking skills; (4) a good personality is a hiring factor in more than 18 percent of the ads, triple the number of a year ago; and (5) a large and varied repertoire of computer experience is the most essential career tool for today's secretary. Salaries ranged from $10,000 to $70,000, with most falling in the $20,000-$30,000 range. (KC)

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FROM NINE TO FIVE

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Secretarial Want Ad Survey

1990

In today's job market, typical office support personnel will "take charge," "catch the ball and run with it," "think on their feet," and "roll with the punches." That's only one of the findings of Dartnell's 1990 Secretarial Want Ad Survey.

The survey, conducted by the Dartnell Corporation's Institute of Business Research and *From Nine to Five*, included the Sunday, February 18 editions of newspapers in 14 U.S. cities—and the Saturday, February 17 editions of newspapers in three Canadian cities. Data from 4,500 individual ads were tabulated. Most significant are the requests for technical talents and skills in today's secretaries.

The survey tracked 34 types of information in secretarial ads relating to skills and qualities required, job duties, salaries, and industry of the employer. The ads were divided into five job classifications: Administrative Assistant, Executive Secretary, Secretary, Secretary/Receptionist, and Administrative Secretary. Key findings included:

- Word processing is still the most-requested skill in secretaries—appearing in 54% of the ads.
- Many ads prefer backgrounds in *specific* software programs. WordPerfect is by far the most requested, appearing in 38% of the ads seeking word processing experience. Lotus 1-2-3 is the most popular spreadsheet program, mentioned in 87% of the spreadsheet-specific ads.
- The once-treasured knowledge of shorthand seems to be heading toward the same fate as the manual typewriter. Only 11% of the ads ask for shorthand or fast-notetaking skills.
- A ready smile is almost as valued as flying fingers on the PC. A good personality is a hiring factor in more than 18% of all ads, triple the number of a year ago.

The Dartnell/*From Nine to Five* survey indicates that secretaries are playing a key role in the technological changes that are altering the way companies do business. Requests for secretaries who are computer-friendly are rising as quickly as the needs for mechanical skills like shorthand are diminishing. A large—and varied—repertoire of computer experience is the most essential career tool for today's busy secretary.

Job Classifications

The percentage of jobs in each title classification has remained relatively constant, when compared to previous surveys. Positions titled "secretary" predominated in 58.16% of the ads. Ads seeking administrative assistants dropped this year to 23.45%, down from last year's 25.71%. Other percentages: executive secretary, 6.21%; secretary/receptionist, 8.21%; and administrative secretary, 3.70%.

The title itself seems to be one of the few constants in a secretary's job. Despite labels such as administrative assistant or office manager, the title *secretary* with no adornment seems to be the word everyone relates to.

Industries and Specialties

Almost two-thirds of the ads indicated the industry of the employer. The industries most frequently mentioned in the ads were: legal, 13.89%; health/medical, 7.82%; financial, 7.29%; and nonprofit agencies, 6.82%.

Other cited industries included: sales/marketing, 5.45%; engineering/architecture, 5.20%; real estate, 5.18%; manufacturing/utility, 4.48%; media/communications, 3.84%; service, 3.64%; consulting/accounting, 3.45%; advertising/public relations, 2.67%; and personnel/human resources, 2.14%.

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Shorthand

The percentage of ads requesting shorthand or fast notetaking skills was 10.12%, down from 13.88% in the 1989 survey. Only 8.44% of the ads requested "secretarial skills." When included with the shorthand/fast-notetaking categories (as did previous surveys), the percentage of ads requesting stenographic skills was only 18.56%, down from last year's 19.13%. Notably, ads for executive secretaries had the highest percentage of shorthand/fast-notetaking mentions at 25.56%, down from last year's 33%.

Skills/Abilities

Twenty-three skills were tracked in the ads to identify which received top priority by prospective employers. None of the ads identified all the skills, yet some mentioned at least half of them. Ads generally do not list every skill an employer may want, but they do highlight the skills they value most in applicants.

The five most-requested skills/abilities were: computer, 65.32%; word processing, 53.89%; organizational, 25.20%; communication, 22.28%; and telephone, 18.32%.

Education/Experience

Typically, secretaries are not required to have a college degree. Education requirements were down slightly from last year; 3.90% of the ads requested some post-secondary education, compared to 4.70% last year.

Percentages of ads requiring education beyond high school were: administrative assistant, 1.83%; executive secretary, 0.38%; secretary/receptionist, 0.16%; and administrative secretary, 0.11%.

Experience was implied in virtually all the ads that provided any details. This was determined by the title, skills, and duties required for the various jobs. Very few ads mentioned that no experience was necessary. Many of the employers sought not only secretaries with general clerical skills, but also with experience in specific fields or industries.

Typing Requirements

Approximately 46% of the ads gave a speed requirement which averaged 65 wpm. The majority of ads requested typing speeds in the 60-80 wpm categories. However, ads that requested word-processing skills generally asked for faster typing speeds—some in excess of 100 wpm.

Percentage of Ads Mentioning Specific Skills/Abilities

	Percentage	
Skill/Ability	1990	1989
Computer	65.32	62.32
Word Processing	53.89	55.88
Organizational	25.20	25.11
Communication	22.28	21.22
Telephone	18.32	17.50
Personality	18.30	5.98
Initiative	14.01	16.34
Interpersonal	11.19	9.40
Writing	10.75	6.62
Math/Bookkeeping	9.83	7.84
General Office	9.49	10.80
Administrative	6.96	8.59
Dictation	6.01	7.17
Bilingual	6.01	7.17
Spelling/Grammar	3.95	6.53
Confidentiality	1.25	2.09

Word Processing/Computers

The percentage of ads requesting computer experience was 65.32%, up from last year's 62.32%. Word processing skills were specifically mentioned in 53.89% of the ads. This was down slightly from last year's 55.88%, yet still greatly above 1988's 44%. Other requested computer experience included: spreadsheet, 10.22%; database, 1.89%; and desktop publishing, 0.80%.

Approximately 52% of the ads asking for computer experience also asked for experience in specific hardware or software. In terms of software programs, WordPerfect is by far the most requested word processing program, appearing in 38% of the ads seeking word processing experience. Lotus 1-2-3 is the most popular spreadsheet program, mentioned in 87% of the spreadsheet-specific ads.

Employers who look for computer-literate secretaries expect their new hires to get training elsewhere. Notably, only 3.34% of the ads stated that the new employer was willing to train secretaries in computers. This indicates that employers place a high value on previous computer training.

The Composite Secretary

No matter what a secretary's style, there seems to be a job description to match it. Some employers seem to long for yesteryear as they seek an "old-fashioned" "workaholic with brains," or a "den mother" with "old school values," and a "healthy dose of common sense."

The modern secretary soon may have to request hazard pay, according to the ads that ask for a "strong," "durable," "nuts and bolts" secretary who can "catch the ball and run with it," "hit the ground running," "roll with the punches," "juggle," and "leap tall buildings in a single bound." However, one ad reassures applicants that "combat boots are not required." Another ad, citing that a "grumpy boss seeks discipline from a tough secretary," seems to require a very unique individual.

While secretaries are asked to "do nearly the impossible" and "create order out of chaos," they are expected to have a "cheerful smile," "a bubbly voice," "a touch of class," "a good sense of humor," and "an ability to smile when things get hectic." In fact, recent ads also hint that an amiable personality is more valued than many clerical skills. Personality is a factor in more than 18% of the ads, triple the number of a year ago.

Superlatives typify many of the ads which ask for a "creme de la creme" "plum of a secretary," who has the potential to be a "corporate superstar."

Some employers sought "crackerjack alter egos" or a "bright, flexible right and left arm" who can "think on his or her feet," "assist in very personal matters," and "grow like a weed."

Secretary seekers also looked for a "go-getter," a "perfectionist," and a "troubleshooter" with a "Yes, I can attitude" and "finesse" to effectively "schmooze with clients."

The trend towards nonsmoking secretaries was reflected in the survey. Almost 5% of the ads specifically requested secretaries who didn't smoke. A few out-of-the-ordinary ads asked for a "computer whiz" with the "combined talents of a telephone directory, goodwill ambassador, detective, and nurse." One ad sought "a motorcycle lover," while another asked for a secretary with "a clean police record." Despite the elaborate descriptions found in this year's survey, one prospective employer summed it up quite simply—"Wanted: a secretary who is good at everything."

Salaries

Annual salaries offered to office support personnel range from $10,000 to $70,000. Many of the classified ads did not mention salary. Ads mentioning one salary were tallied in the low salary category—with the assumption that qualified secretaries might negotiate above, but not below, the advertised salary figure.

Annual Salary Ranges by Title

(rounded to the nearest dollar)

Title/Position	Quoted Salary Range	Average Salary Range
Administrative Assistant	$10,400-$40,000	$23,402-$24,450
Executive Secretary	$14,000-$45,000	$26,894-$27,654
Administrative Secretary	$15,000-$45,000	$25,199-$28,466
Secretary/Receptionist	$12,480-$28,800	$18,091-$20,654
Secretary	$10,000-$70,000	$20,593-$24,927

Annual Salary Ranges by City
(rounded to the nearest dollar)

City	Quoted Salary Range	Average Salary Range
Chicago, IL	$12,480-$40,000	$23,180-$26,289
New York, NY	$13,000-$70,000	$28,183-$30,237
St. Louis, MO	$10,000-$50,000	$16,500-$20,143
Miami, FL	$12,480-$32,000	$21,570-$24,737
Dallas, TX	$12,480-$32,000	$19,629-$23,133
Cleveland, OH	$10,400-$26,000	$17,148-$20,628
Atlanta, GA	$12,500-$40,000	$19,817-$24,716
Philadelphia, PA	$14,017-$35,000	$21,036-$24,322
Memphis, TN	$12,000-$23,000	$15,326-$15,928
Denver, CO	$12,240-$32,000	$16,926-$19,974
Des Moines, IA	$12,480-$32,000	$17,609-$23,700
Kansas City, MO	$10,400-$26,000	$17,124-$18,760
Los Angeles, CA	$14,000-$37,000	$24,167-$27,540
Seattle, WA	$12,480-$30,000	$20,134-$20,386
Toronto, ON	C22,000-C28,500	C24,000-C25,250
Montreal, PQ	C15,600-C34,000	C23,288-C27,063
Vancouver, BC	C12,000-C36,000	C22,216-C23,931

Newspapers surveyed

United States: *Chicago Tribune, New York Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Miami Herald, Dallas Morning News, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Atlanta Journal/Constitution, Philadelphia Inquirer, Memphis Commercial Appeal, Denver Post, Des Moines Register, Kansas City Star, Los Angeles Times, Seattle Times.*

Canada: *Toronto Star, Vancouver Sun, Montreal Gazette.*